

SCHOOL OF NURSING

STUDENT BEHAVIOR IN A PROFESSIONAL ACADEMIC PROGRAM POLICY

I. Introduction and Background

Salisbury University (the “University”) and the School of Nursing (“SON”) strive to attract, matriculate, and educate students who possess both the intellectual capacity for nursing and who also exhibit a high capacity for ethical and professional behavior. Fundamental attributes of ethical and professional behavior include but are not limited to honesty, integrity, and civility, as well as a demonstrated desire to learn, respect for the academic process, concern for the welfare of patients and their families, commitment to patient confidentiality, respect for the rights of others, emotional maturity, and self-discipline. Since the development of ethical and professional behavior is an integral part of education in nursing, demonstrating such conduct during your education is an academic matter. Professionalism is a cornerstone of a successful academic program, just as it is a cornerstone of the responsible conduct of research, maintaining integrity and compassion in the delivery of health care, and building a collegial and conscientious health professions team.

Circumstances may arise during a student’s course of study that call into question the capacity or commitment of the student to maintain this academic standard. The University and the SON have the responsibility and authority to determine a student’s fitness to continue in their program of study.

The process of transitioning from a student to a health care professional requires study, self-reflection, and self-management on the part of learners. Development of ethical and professional behavior is critical in the education of nursing students and considered a core competency in the academic program. Thus, ethical and professional behaviors are key factors in achieving and maintaining academic good standing. When a student accepts an offer of admission into one of the SON programs, he or she commits to comply with all University and SON rules and expectations, including those regarding ethical and professional conduct.

II. Policy and Procedures

The SON has established this “Student Behavior in a Professional Academic Program Policy” (“Policy”). In addition to the academic and clinical-related requirements of each program, this Policy and its related procedures govern academic, ethical, and professional behavior of nursing students.

The Policy and procedures identify student responsibilities and rights in conjunction with standards of fairness, privacy, and due process. They are derived, in part, from the standards of conduct adopted and published by national organizations that accredit School of Nursing programs (e.g., CCNE, American Nurses Association, etc.) or license or credential Professional Graduates (e.g., state licensing boards, NCLEX, etc.) and the standards of ethical and professional behavior adopted by national and local professional organizations (e.g., American Nurses Association, Scope and Standards of Nursing Practice,

2nd ed., etc.). Students are also expected to comply with federal, state, and local laws and regulations, and University policies and procedures (e.g., Code of Community Standards, Policy and Procedures Prohibiting Sexual Misconduct and Other Sex and Gender-Based Discrimination, etc.).

As noted above, professional ethical and behavior standards are integral elements to the comprehensive education of nursing students and violations of this Policy are academic matters. Failure to meet ethical and professional behavior standards may result in: i) action up to, and possibly including, program dismissal, and ii) referral to the Dean of Students, which may result in suspension or dismissal from the University. A student who violates this Policy will jeopardize their advancement through the SON program and the likelihood of completing the program and graduating.

III. Objective

The objective of this Policy is to articulate the academic importance of the ethical and professional behavior of students within nursing programs in the SON. This Policy provides students, faculty, and staff with clearly articulated expectations regarding student ethical and professional behavior, assures professional programs have the authority and responsibility to act on concerns regarding the ethical and professional behavior of students, outlines a description of the procedures for managing and addressing student ethical and professional behavior, and assures standards are implemented consistent with principles of fairness, privacy, and due process.

IV. Scope

- A. This Policy is a means to formally address unmet professional behaviors. All nursing students are expected to demonstrate high standards of ethical and professional behavior in all educational and clinical settings including, but not limited to:
 - (i) Classroom-based milieu (e.g., classrooms, lecture halls, laboratories, online and technology-based classes);
 - (ii) Professional and clinical sites that are part of the learning program (e.g., hospitals, clinics, community health centers, schools, ambulatory settings, Henson Medical Simulation Center, and study abroad); and
 - (iii) Other settings not part of the formal learning program but which contribute to the learning process (e.g., student-run special interest group meetings and activities, clubs and governance structures, interactions with other administrators, faculty and staff of the University, or any other member of the campus community).

- B. In addition, while this Policy is intended to guide the ethical and professional behavior of students studying in the SON and is not intended to directly guide or address behavior that is a part of a student's private life, such behavior may come to the attention of the University in several ways and therefore become the focus of an investigation in the following ways:
 - (i) Student conduct may be reported to a member of the faculty or administration from a variety of sources, raising concern about a student's capacity to continue their studies. If such reported conduct raises a concern about the safety of the student or the safety of others who the student may have contact with or includes behavior that could indicate an issue with judgment or moral, ethical, or personal values that would preclude satisfactory functioning in the chosen discipline, an investigation may be

conducted and action taken based on the results of the investigation.

(ii) If a student is charged with an offense in the civil justice system, and the University becomes aware of and verifies this circumstance through self-report by the student or a reliable, verified source, the information shall be provided to the Dean of Students. The University, in its sole discretion, will promptly pursue an investigation and may direct commensurate academic and/or student judicial disciplinary action simultaneous with or in advance of any final adjudication of the civil court proceeding. The University will conduct this process in accordance with its policies, regardless of whether the student participates in the process or withdraws from the program or the University.

(iii) If a student is charged with a criminal offense, he or she is obligated to report this to their Program Director or SON Director immediately. If a matriculating student has been charged with a criminal offense at any time after submitting an application to the University, the student must inform the Program Director or SON Director of the criminal charges immediately and whenever possible, before the first day of classes. If the University later discovers that a student withheld disclosure of a criminal charge, he or she may be subject to immediate program dismissal by the Program Director and/or SON Director. The information concerning the criminal charge will be reported to the Dean of Students. The University, in its sole discretion, will promptly pursue an investigation and may direct commensurate academic and/or student judicial disciplinary action simultaneous with or in advance of any final adjudication of the criminal court proceeding. The University will conduct this process in accordance with its policies, regardless of whether the student participates in the process or withdraws from the program or the University. This is consistent with the obligation of the University and its health professions programs to ensure the safety of patients and others.

- C. Nursing students are always expected to hold themselves to the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct. As part of their education, these students must begin to practice behavior that they will uphold for the rest of their professional lives. While not all-inclusive, examples of unacceptable ethical and professional behavior include, but are not limited to, the following:
- (i) Lack of integrity and honesty (e.g., lying about, misrepresenting, or not reporting information about care given; clinical error or any action related to clinical functions; acting outside the scope of the student's role in a clinical, academic, professional, or administrative setting);
 - (ii) Failure to demonstrate professional demeanor or concern for patient safety (e.g., use of offensive language and gestures; being under the influence of alcohol or drugs in the educational or clinic setting);
 - (iii) Unmet professional responsibility (e.g., not contributing to an atmosphere conducive to learning due to poor attendance; punctuality issues; distracting or insensitive behavior in class, lab, or clinic; poor personal hygiene; needing continual reminders to

- complete responsibilities in a timely manner; not responding to written, verbal, email, telephone or other requests in a timely manner; breaching patient confidentiality);
- (iv) Exhibiting disruptive or uncivil behavior (e.g., assault or threat of assault; throwing things; making inappropriate gestures; threats or verbal intimidation; language that belittles or demeans; negative comments with racial, ethnic, religious, age, gender, or sexual overtones; making impertinent or inappropriate written entries in the medical record; making statements attacking students, faculty, or staff). Certain behavior complaints, particularly in cases of complaints of sexual harassment, sexual assault and other violations of the University's Policy and Procedures Prohibiting Sexual Misconduct and Other Sex and Gender-Based Discrimination will be reported to the University's Office of Institutional Equity ("OIE");
 - (v) Lack of effort toward self-improvement and adaptability (e.g., resistant or defensive in accepting constructive criticism; remaining unaware of one's inadequacies; resisting considering or making suggested changes to improve learning, behavior, or performance; not accepting responsibility for errors or failure; abusive or inappropriately critical or arrogant);
 - (vi) Lack of respect for cultural diversity (e.g., inappropriate behavior with respect to age, culture, race, religion, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation). Certain behaviors that may constitute discrimination will be reported to the OIE;
 - (vii) Exhibiting poor relationships with members of the health care team (e.g., not functioning appropriately within the health care team or not demonstrating the ability to collaborate with fellow students, staff);
 - (viii) Exhibiting poor relationships with patients and families (e.g., insensitive to the patient's or family's needs, inappropriate personal relationships with patients or members of their families; lack of empathy);
 - (ix) Failure to maintain and safeguard the confidentiality of patient and research participant information, including paper and electronic records, verbal communications, and social networking and electronic media sites; and
 - (x) Failure to comply with university, school, and/or program academic and clinically related requirements (e.g., education, immunization, HIPAA, FERPA)

V. Procedures for Handling Breaches of Ethical and Professional Behavior Standards

A. Violations of the Policy

Complaints regarding suspected breaches of ethical and professional behavior may be initiated by faculty, administrators or students within the University, the College of Health and Human Services ("CHHS") or SON or by external sources (e.g., patients, families, visitors, extramural rotation sites, or other agencies with which a student has had contact). Additionally, if in the absence of a specific complaint, the University, CHHS or SON become aware of conduct of an egregious or serious nature, it will be investigated in lieu of a formal complaint and will take all appropriate actions in compliance with the procedure outlined in this Policy. The initial complaint should be promptly forwarded to the student's Program Director. If the Program Director is not available or the circumstances of the complaint prevent notification of the

Program Director, the SON Director should be notified. If neither the Program Director nor the SON Director can be notified, the CHHS Dean should be notified promptly. The formal complaint must be in writing, with a brief description of the evidence, and submitted within ten (10) University business days of the discovery of the incident, exclusive of university breaks and academic intercessions. (Note: Complaints brought forward after the 10-day deadline may be reviewed but must be presented with an explanation of why the deadline was not met. Prior to proceeding with the complaint review and investigation, the Program Director or other receiving administrator will evaluate the nature and acceptability of the delay). The University is legally required to investigate all alleged acts of sexual harassment and other sexual misconduct pursuant to the *Salisbury University Policy and Procedures Prohibiting Sexual Misconduct and Other Sex and Gender-Based Discrimination*. These concerns will be referred to the OIE. The University reserves the right to investigate, with or without a formal written complaint, when the University determines it is in the best interest of the University or the community.

B. Complaint Categories

There are four (4) categories of complaints and associated procedures outlined below. The complaints are categorized by severity of behavior and whether immediate punitive action is warranted. The four categories are as follows:

1. **Troubling Behavior - Teaching Opportunity:** Behavior that is of concern but that may be remediated through a single discussion;
2. **Troubling Behavior - Professional Concerns Report:** Behavior that requires a formal process for remediation, for example, situations in which a student has exhibited significant and/or serious behavior problems that do not warrant suspension or dismissal, but need to be corrected;
3. **Troubling Behavior – Multiple Professional Concerns Reports** – may warrant suspension or program dismissal.
4. **Egregious, Unethical, or Unprofessional Behavior:** Behavior requiring immediate action by the Program Director or SON Director through interim suspension or program dismissal.

1. Troubling Behavior – Teaching Opportunity

For less egregious unethical and unprofessional behavior, rather than filing a formal complaint about professional behavior, the faculty member or Program Director may conclude (but is not required to conclude) that the incident is more appropriately handled as a teaching opportunity rather than a disciplinary matter. This policy is a means to formally address unmet professional behaviors. That being said, faculty will use their discretion on whether to enact this policy as there are other means for faculty to address concerns including verbal discussion, clinical performance grading, written feedback. In such cases, the faculty member or Program Director will contact the student directly to discuss the issue, provide feedback, and make suggestions for how the behavioral issue can be mitigated. If the faculty member or Program Director believes an effective resolution resulted from meeting with the student, no further action is required (i.e., Informal Resolution).

However, the incident shall be documented on the Professional Concerns Report (“PCR”, described

below) in the student's file (electronic or paper file) and may be reviewed in the future, where applicable, to indicate a pattern, practice, or failure to benefit from redirection (i.e., documentation of mentoring). The student will be provided a copy of the documentation that is placed in the student's file. This student file will be separate from the student's academic file and kept solely in a secure location within the SON; access to its contents will only be on a need-to-know basis. Faculty may use their discretion as to whether to address this level of concern through this section, or to use other methods to address the behavior, such as verbal discussion, clinical performance grading, and written feedback.

2. Troubling Behavior – Professionalism Concerns Report (PCR)

In the event the faculty member or Program Director/SON Director determines the feedback given to the student regarding the issues of concern was not successful in resolving the issue or if the behavior is of a significant or serious nature (but not warranting immediate suspension or dismissal), the PCR will be completed (i.e., formal resolution) by the faculty member involved or Program Director/SON Director (if the complaint originates from someone other than a program faculty member). The focus of the PCR process is educational, with the goal of helping the student move forward successfully in coursework, clinical practice experience, and interactions within the health care community.

The PCR must be filed with the Program Director within ten (10) University business days from the time the behavior was observed or reported. A copy of the PCR will also be provided to the student, and the student will be encouraged to respond within three (3) University business days to the PCR, in writing to the Program Director discussing the circumstances that led up to the complaint and the nature of the complaint itself. The student's response to the PCR must be submitted to the Program Director prior to any meeting with the Program Director (Note: Complaints brought forward after the 10- day deadline may be reviewed, but they must be presented with an explanation of why the deadline was not met. Prior to proceeding with the complaint review and investigation, the Program Director or other receiving administrator will evaluate the nature and acceptability of the delay).

Within three (3) days of receipt of the PCR and with the purpose of understanding the circumstances of the complaint, the Program Director will conduct an interview of the student, interview witnesses to the event that led up to the complaint, review any pertinent documents, and take any other action deemed necessary to understand the circumstances that brought on the complaint. Based on the outcome of the review, the student's response and student interview, the Program Director may decide that the PCR is unwarranted or may provide the student with strategies to mitigate the identified unprofessional behavior.

During the Program Director's meeting with the student to discuss the findings of the review, the student will be provided with an opportunity for reflection on appropriate behavioral changes. The student will be asked to sign the PCR acknowledging the PCR has been reviewed. The Program Director may require remedial action, such as a corrective action plan or mandated counseling, which shall be noted on the PCR. If a corrective action plan or other remediation is required by the PCR, the plan shall include a timeline for remediation. At the conclusion of this timeline, the Program Director will

meet with the student to review the outcome of the remediation process. The Program Director will place a concluding written comment in the PCR discussing the level of success of the remediation. The PCR will be filed separately from the student's academic file and kept in a secure location within the SON. Access to its contents will only be on a need-to-know basis. The student will be apprised of this record retention in writing by the involved faculty member or Program Director.

3. Troubling Behavior – Multiple Professionalism Concerns Reports

In the event that a student fails on more than one occasion to meet the expected standards of ethical and professional conduct as documented by PCRs in the student's file, the Program Director may exercise the option to institute an interim program dismissal of the student. Within two (2) University business days of a decision for suspension or dismissal, the Program Director will notify the student in writing (by email) of the decision. The Program Director will encourage the student to submit in writing (by email) to the Program Director within two (2) University business days, their description of the events that led up to the punitive action. Concurrently with the notification to the student of a suspension or dismissal, the SON Director will schedule a meeting of the SON Professional Program Student Behavior Policy Committee ("PPSBPC" described below) usually within three (3) University business days of the decision, for review of the complaint and affirmation of the action.

4. Egregious, Unethical, or Unprofessional Behavior

Any accusation of egregious, unethical, or unprofessional behavior should be reported in writing to the Program Director within three (3) University business days. If in the absence of a specific written complaint, individuals within the University, CHHS or School become aware of conduct of an egregious or serious nature, they will investigate in lieu of a formal complaint and will take all appropriate actions in compliance with the procedures outlined in this Policy. Complaints or accusations of egregious, unethical, or unprofessional behavior will be considered serious and necessitate that the Program Director take immediate action to prevent any continuation of the behavior and potential harm to self, patients, or members of the community. If the Program Director is not available or the circumstances of the complaint prevent notification of the Program Director, the School Director should be notified. If neither the Program Director nor the School Director can be notified, the CHHS Dean should be notified promptly.

Following notification and with the purpose of understanding the circumstances of the complaint, the Program Director will urgently (i.e., within 24 hours of the complaint) conduct an interview of the student and any witnesses to the event that led up to the complaint, and review any pertinent documents and any other action deemed necessary to make an interim decision.

The reported behavior can result in the student's immediate suspension or dismissal from the program. Examples of egregious misconduct include, but are not limited to, patient endangerment, unacceptable patient management, inappropriate alteration of patient records, behavior posing a danger to persons or property, an ongoing threat of or disruption of the academic process, or certain acts of sexual misconduct. A Program Director has the authority to take the immediate action of suspending or dismissing a student from a clinical session, didactic class, and/or from the program.

If the decision for suspension or dismissal is made, the Program Director will notify the student in writing (by email) of the decision and will encourage the student to submit to the Program Director, a description in writing (by email) of the events that led up to the Program Director's punitive action.

Concurrently with the notification to the student of a suspension or dismissal, the SON Director will schedule a meeting of the PPSBPC, usually within three (3) University business days of the decision, for review of the complaint and affirmation of the action.

VI. The Professional Program Student Behavior Policy Committee (PPSBPC)

A. Structure

The SON PPSBPC ("Committee") will be assembled on an as needed basis. The committee will consist of two faculty members and one student. The student against whom a complaint is made will be allowed to choose one of the faculty members, the SON Director will appoint the other faculty member. All full-time tenured, tenure-track and clinical faculty may serve on the Committee. The student representative will be chosen by the SON Director. The student should be in the same program as the student against whom the complaint is brought (traditional undergraduate, second degree, Master's program, etc.), but should not be in the same cohort when possible. Neither of the faculty nor the student can have any connection to the complaint. The Committee will appoint a Director for the hearing.

B. Hearing Process

All materials pertinent to the complaint and its consequences must be submitted to the Committee, usually within two (2) University business days of the Program Director's action. The review by the Committee will usually be conducted on the third University business day.

The Director of the Committee shall be responsible for conducting the hearing in an efficient and decorous manner and shall rule on all disputes related to the procedures used throughout the proceedings. The Director may set reasonable limits that as to the length and nature of opening and closing statements, the evidence presented, and the duration of the hearing. At any time, the Director may seek the advice of University legal counsel. The procedures are designed to assure fundamental fairness, to afford student notice and an opportunity to be heard, and to protect students from arbitrary or capricious disciplinary action. The Committee will review all submitted written documentation, will conduct an interview of the student and any appropriate witnesses to the event that led up to and including the specific complaint, and will review any other action deemed necessary to support or oppose the action taken by the Program Director.

The hearing shall be closed, with attendance limited to individuals directly connected to the case as determined by the Director of the Committee. The Committee shall decide based on a preponderance of the evidence standard, namely an assessment of whether it is more likely than not that the actions complained of occurred.

A written record of the Committee's support or opposition to the action taken by the Program

Director shall be submitted to the Program Director, Director, the student, the CHHS Dean, and Office

demetic Affairs, within two (2) University business days of the review. Should the action (suspending or dismissing a student from the program) of the Program Director be upheld by the Committee, the student may submit an appeal and request a review, as described within the Appeal Process section of this Policy. If the Committee's decision is contrary to the described punitive action by the Program Director, the SON Director, in consultation with the Committee, will make the final decision.

C. Appeal Process

The only appropriate grounds for appeal are:

- (a) discrimination based on the exercise by the student of rights guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, or by the Maryland Constitution; or
- (b) discrimination based on the student's race, color, sex, religion, creed, national origin, age, disability, veteran's status, or other forms of discrimination prohibited by law or pursuant to University policies; or
- (c) actions of personal malice against the student. For purposes of this section, the term "personal malice" means dislike, animosity, ill-will, or hatred based on personal characteristics, traits, or circumstances of an individual.

If the student believes they have grounds for appeal, they first should appeal in writing to the Director of the SON within three (3) business days of notification from the Committee. If the SON Director supports the Committee decision for dismissal, a student who has been dismissed from the School and/or Program and has exhausted all available appeals at the School and/or Program level may appeal to the CHHS Professional Behavior Committee. Details on the relevant procedures are available at:

[https://www.salisbury.edu/academic-offices/health-and-human-services/files/Policy and Procedure for Professional Behavior Violations.pdf](https://www.salisbury.edu/academic-offices/health-and-human-services/files/Policy%20and%20Procedure%20for%20Professional%20Behavior%20Violations.pdf)

Appeal form available at:

[https://www.salisbury.edu/academic-offices/health-and-human-services/files/Professional Behavior Violation Appeal Request Form.pdf](https://www.salisbury.edu/academic-offices/health-and-human-services/files/Professional%20Behavior%20Violation%20Appeal%20Request%20Form.pdf)

APPENDIX 1

Professional Concerns Report (PCR) Form Salisbury University – School of Nursing

PROFESSIONAL CONCERNS REPORT

Student Name	Course (Name& Course No.) *or Incident Site
Name of Course Faculty Member, Program Director, or School Director	Date of Incident(s)
Signature of Course Faculty Member, Program Director, or School Director	Date Discussed with Student
If applicable	

This report is prepared when a student exhibits behavior not consistent with the guidelines set by the Student Behavior in a Professional Academic Program Policy and is intended to assist the student in meeting professionalism expectations in academic, professional or administrative settings. Improvement in the area(s) noted below is needed in order to meet the standards of professionalism inherent in being a health care provider.

Check the appropriate categories. Comments are required. Patient-Centered Care

- The student did not act in the best interest of the patient.
- The student did not demonstrate sensitivity to the needs, values or perspectives of patients, family members or caregivers.
- The student did not establish appropriate rapport with patients, family members or caregivers.
- The student did not demonstrate openness/responsiveness to the patient’s ethnic and cultural background.
- The student did not respond to patient needs in a timely, safe or effective manner.
- Other unprofessional behavior related to Patient Centered Care (enumerate below):

Comments: (Describe the specifics of the incident-who, what, when, where)

Respect

- The student did not demonstrate respect for the rights of others in academic or professional settings.
- The student did not demonstrate respect in interactions with others.
- The student did not establish or maintain appropriate boundaries with patients, family members, fellow students, faculty or staff.
- Regardless of his/her intent and based on the recipient's response, the student did not demonstrate respect for all persons, regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, disability, gender identity, genetic identity, ethnicity or socioeconomic status.
- The student did not demonstrate respect for the confidentiality rights of patients or others.
- The student did not demonstrate civil "best practices" and/or uphold the Civility pledge.
- Other behavior that demonstrated lack of respect (enumerate below):

Comments: (Describe the specifics of the incident-who, what, when, where)

Integrity

- The student provided false or incomplete information in an academic, professional or administrative setting.
- The student acted outside the scope of his/her role in an academic, professional or administrative setting.
- The student presented the work of others as his/her own.
- The student used his/her professional position for personal advantage.
- The student used the physical or intellectual property of others without permission or attribution.
- Other behavior that demonstrated lack of integrity (enumerate below):

Comments: (Describe the specifics of the incident-who, what, when, where)

Service

- The student did not function collaboratively within the health care team.
- The student did not demonstrate sensitivity to the requests of the health care team.
- The student did not demonstrate the ability to collaborate with students, faculty and staff in a learning environment.
- Other behavior that impeded collaboration (enumerate below):

Comments: (Describe the specifics of the incident-who, what, when, where)

Responsibility

- The student was unprepared, tardy, absent and/or missed deadlines/appointments.
- The student was disruptive or rude.
- The student needed continual reminders in the fulfillment of responsibilities.
- The student did not accept responsibility for her/his actions, recommendations or errors.
- The student could not be relied upon to complete her/his responsibilities in a timely manner.
- The student did not adhere to policies, procedures and/or instructions:
- The student did not dress in attire appropriate for a patient care setting.
- Other irresponsible behavior (enumerate below):

Comments: (Describe the specifics of the incident-who, what, when, where)

Responsiveness & Adaptability

- The student was resistant or defensive when provided with constructive feedback.
- The student did not demonstrate awareness of her/his own limitations and/or was unwilling to seek help when appropriate.
- The student resisted adopting recommendations from faculty or others to improve learning or performance.
- The student did not demonstrate adaptability in a patient care or classroom environment.
- The student used the physical or intellectual property of others without permission or attribution.
- Other behavior that impeded reliability, adaptability or self-improvement (enumerate below):

Comments: (Describe the specifics of the incident-who, what, when, where)

Faculty member/Program Director/Director's recommendations and/or requirements for remedying the professionalism concerns listed on this report.

Comments: (Describe the specifics of the incident-who, what, when, where)

