

MSW Student Standards and Advancement Policies and Procedures

Introduction

Advancement is a process intended to assure that each student maintains adequate progress in gaining the values, knowledge, skills, competencies, and behaviors required for successful professional practice. Students are automatically advanced if they meet or exceed all our expectations and should consider themselves to be making adequate progress unless they are otherwise informed.

Because of the nature of professional social work practice, the School of Social Welfare has some expectations of students that are different from those typically found in other academic but non-professional programs. The standards are linked to students' abilities to become effective social work professionals and are provided so that students and faculty can be clear about expectations and procedures to address academic performance or behavioral concerns. The goal of the Standards is to help students to successfully graduate and provide effective social work services in a range of settings over the course of one's career.

Upon admission, all social work students will be provided with and are expected to read the *KU School of Social Welfare Technical Standards*, the *KU Student Code of Conduct*, the *Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW)* and the *MSW Student Advancement Policy* (this document). Students will then be asked to electronically sign an acknowledgment that they: (1) have read these documents, (2) are aware of their contents, and (3) will abide by the standards elaborated in the documents. The form will be kept in students' files.

MSW Student Standards

Within the School of Social Welfare, we expect students to meet or exceed certain basic minimum standards to demonstrate their ability to advance to degree completion. These standards are categorized as technical standards, scholastic performance, ethical behavior and professional conduct.

Technical Standards

First, students must attest that they possess the physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioral attributes necessary to fulfill the requirements of social work education. To adequately prepare for, and engage in, social work practice, students must be able to demonstrate the following abilities in order to fully participate in all aspects of coursework and the field practicum.

1. Communication- A student must be able to communicate effectively, sensitively, and professionally with other students, faculty, staff, clients, field instructor, and practicum agency staff in accordance with the NASW Code of Ethics. Communication includes not only speech but also reading and writing. The student must be able to communicate effectively and efficiently in oral and written form.

2. **Motor and Sensory-** A student must have sufficient motor and sensory function to be able to attend class and complete a practicum placement, with or without accommodation, by executing motor movements reasonably required to function in an academic environment and provide services to clients. Where indicated by a letter of accommodation from the Academic Achievement and Access Center, they shall make reasonable accommodation in order to allow the student to meet these standards.
3. **Intellectual, Conceptual, Integrative and Quantitative Abilities-** A student must possess reasoning, analysis, and synthesis abilities. Problem solving, a critical skill required of a social worker, requires all of these intellectual abilities. These skills are necessary in order for students to make proper assessments, prioritize interventions, and measure/report client and community outcomes.
4. **Behavioral and Social Attributes-** A student must possess the behavioral and social skills required for full utilization of their intellectual abilities, the exercise of sound judgment, the prompt completion of all responsibilities as specified in the BSW & MSW handbook, and the development of sensitive and effective professional relationships with clients and community members, in accordance with the *NASW Code of Ethics*. A student must be able to function effectively under stress. A student must be able to adapt to changing environments, display flexibility, and learn to function in the face of uncertainties inherent to social work practice. Compassion, integrity, concern for others, interpersonal skill, interest, and motivation are all personal qualities that will be assessed during the admissions and education process. A student must be willing to effectively use help and supports for medical or emotional issues that interfere with performance.
5. **Self-awareness-**A student must know how his/her values, beliefs, past experiences, and attitudes impact their own thought processes and behaviors. The student must be prepared to engage in self-reflection and change behaviors that obstruct his/her work with clients and community members, agency staff, field instructors, other students, faculty, and staff. A student must be able to tolerate ambiguity.
6. **Appreciation of diversity-** In accordance with the *NASW Code of Ethics*, a student must be able to work with a variety of diverse groups, and progress towards cultural competence regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical ability.

Scholastic Performance Standards

MSW students are expected to maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.0 in order to be awarded the MSW degree. A student who is admitted to the MSW program on a provisional basis must earn a 3.0 or greater in their first nine credit hours of study. MSW students must also earn a grade of S in Field Practicum courses; a Grade of U assigned in Field Practicum indicates unsatisfactory progress. Note: No credit is awarded in any course in which a student earns below a C, regardless of cumulative GPA.

Ethical Behavior Standards

The School has a professional values commitment that requires the highest standards of conduct in human interactions. Students must agree to abide by the ethical requirements of the NASW Code of Ethics. Student behaviors in classroom, field, university and the wider community should demonstrate adherence to the ethical expectations and obligations of professional practice, noted in the *NASW Code of Ethics* and the *KU Student Code of Conduct*. This includes, though may not be limited to:

- Adherence to the *NASW Code of Ethics* and the *KU Student Code of Conduct*.
- No involvement with the criminal justice system that is so recent, consistent and/or serious that it may prevent one's ability to engage in effective professional practice.
- Systematic evaluation of clients, communities and larger environmental systems and their situations in an unbiased, factual way. Suspension of personal biases during interactions with others.
- Comprehension of a variety of ways of life and values. Empathic communication and support of the client and community systems as a basis for a productive professional relationship.
- Appreciation of the value of diversity. Effective and nonjudgmental relation to and work with others who are different from oneself. Appropriate service to all persons in need of assistance, regardless of the person's race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical ability. No imposition of personal, religious, sexual, and/or cultural values on clients or communities.
- Demonstration of respect for the rights of others. Commitment to clients' and communities' rights to freedom of choice and self-determination.
- Maintenance of confidentiality as it relates to human services, classroom activities, and field placements.
- Demonstration of honesty and integrity by being truthful about background, experiences, and qualifications; doing one's own work; giving credit for the ideas of others; and providing proper citation of source materials. Behavior should be consistent with the rules on Academic Misconduct found in the University Senate Rules and Regulations and the School of Social Welfare statements on avoiding Academic Misconduct found elsewhere in the *MSW Student Handbook*.
- Demonstration of clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries. Does not sexually harass others; make verbal or physical threats; commit acts of violence; become involved in sexual relationships with clients, supervisors, or faculty; abuse others in physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual ways; or participate in dual relationships where conflicts of interest may exist.

Professional Conduct Standards

The School of Social Work recognizes that preparation for professional practice requires more than scholastic achievement. The program expects students to exhibit behaviors that are consistent with the behaviors one would commonly encounter when engaging with professional social work practitioners. These are norms of decorum, presentation of self, respectful

professional interaction, and qualities such as consistency, reliability, and self-reflection. Such behavior is expected not only in the classroom but throughout the University and the larger community. Thus, we expect that to remain in good standing with the School of Social Welfare MSW program, students must continuously demonstrate:

Professional Commitment. Exhibits a strong commitment to the goals of social work and to the ethical standards of the profession, as specified in the NASW Code of Ethics. Demonstrates commitment to the essential values of social work that include the respect for the dignity and worth of every individual and a commitment to social justice.

Professional Conduct. Students are preparing for professional practice while they are students in the School of Social Welfare. Thus, we expect them to exhibit behaviors that:

- Comply with program policies, institutional policies, and professional ethical standards.
- Are consistent with societal laws that are relevant to social work ethics and values and to the ability to practice professional social work effectively.
- Are professional in terms of appearance, dress, and general demeanor, including the use of appropriately professional language and tone of voice in interactions with clients, faculty, administration, staff, and other students.
- Show potential for responsible and accountable behavior by knowing and practicing within the scope of social work, respecting others, being punctual and dependable, prioritizing responsibilities, attending class regularly, observing deadlines, completing assignments on time, keeping appointments or making appropriate arrangements, and accepting supervision and constructive criticism in a positive manner.
- Demonstrate a prioritization of educational goals and the ability to balance competing life priorities.
- Demonstrate the ability to effectively make and implement a plan of study in cooperation with the faculty and staff.
- Work effectively with others, regardless of level of authority.
- Advocate for themselves in an appropriate and responsible manner and use proper channels for conflict resolution.
- Show a willingness to receive and accept feedback and supervision in a positive manner, as well as use such feedback to enhance professional development.

Failure to Meet the MSW Student Standards and the Process of Student Review

When students fail, or are in danger of failing, to meet performance standards in any of the four areas necessary for student advancement, the MSW program responds to attempt to promote student success while simultaneously maintaining standards that protect the clients and communities we serve, the profession, the reputation of the school, and the safety of our students, staff, and faculty.

Building upon a time-honored tradition within the School of Social Welfare and our stated commitment to the central importance of human relationships, we always hope to begin by resolving concerns through the least intrusive and most empowering ways that we can. The relationships with instructors (field and classroom) are often the most important to students due to their frequency of contact and relevance for future career goals. Thus, we encourage those most proximate to the students to identify concerns early and address them through less formal means in the hopes of preventing future problems and in reducing the defensiveness that can occur when more formal mechanisms of oversight must come into play. Our three-tiered system begins with the assumption that, working together in good faith, instructors and students can resolve issues proactively and preserve those relationships in accordance with our *School of Social Welfare Mission and Principles*.

However, it is important to note that there are times when student performance issues are so pervasive, severe or egregious that they immediately necessitate a Tier 3 response. For example, a student who is simultaneously demonstrating academic, ethical and professional difficulties may move directly to a third-tier review, which includes the convening of a meeting with the Student Review Committee (SRC). The three-tiered approach is presented in the table below, and we will describe this in more detail in the section that follows. In addition, the Field Director or Program Director may be involved at any point in the process, including a Tier 1 or 2 response.

Responding to Student Problems: 3 Tier System

Three-Tiered Response to Student Performance Difficulties in the MSW Program

Tier	Scholastic Expectations	Ethical Expectations	Professional	Technical
Tier One	Classroom or Field Instructor/Field Staff problem solves with student, and notifies administration	Classroom or Field Instructor/Field Staff problem solves with student, and notifies administration	Classroom or Field Instructor/Field Staff problem solves with student, and notifies administration	Not Applicable
Tier Two	In consultation with administration, an Academic Advisor or Field Liaison/Field Staff develops a	In consultation with administration, an Academic Advisor or Field Liaison/Field Staff develops	In consultation with administration, Academic Advisor/Field Liaison/Field Staff develops Student Success Plan	Not Applicable

	Student Success Plan	a Student Success Plan		
Tier Three	Formal meeting of the SRC is convened by MSW Program Director	Formal meeting of the SRC is convened by MSW Program Director	Formal meeting of the SRC is convened by MSW Program Director	Formal meeting of the SRC is convened by MSW Program Director

Technical Standards

In most cases, concerns with students' abilities to meet the technical standards are addressed during the admission process, and students lacking these foundational capabilities will not be admitted. In cases where students are admitted but demonstrate through performance in the classroom or in field that they are unable to perform basic tasks necessary to engage in the social work educational process, a Tier 3 SRC is promptly held.

Scholastic performance

Tier 1 Review. The signs of academic difficulty often begin quite early in the semester, and most lapses in scholastic performance are dealt with at the level of the classroom instructor (Tier 1). Typically, the instructor will attempt to make arrangements and provide supports for students to succeed. Similarly, performance in field coursework is also addressed by the Field Instructors in collaboration with the student. At times, however, this does not resolve the issue, and students then move toward a second-tier intervention.

Tier 2 Review. At the Tier 2 level, when students earn below a 3.0 cumulative GPA, they are given a formal **academic warning**. For a GPA between 2.86 and 2.99, the Academic Advisor notifies the student in writing, indicating grades needed to bring up the GPA to the required level. The student and appropriate professional staff person develop a plan to meet grade requirements, which is then placed in the student's file for reference.

Tier 3 Review. With a GPA of 2.85 and below, the MSW Program Director promptly notifies the student and the student's academic advisor in writing that the student has been placed on **academic probation**. A SRC meeting is then convened to determine the student's continued status in the program. A description of the SRC and its processes are below.

In field coursework, when a Grade of U is assigned in field practicum, indicating unsatisfactory progress, the field instructor immediately notifies the student and the field liaison. The liaison notifies the Director of Field Education, who sends written notice to the student that an SRC meeting will be held to review the student's status.

Students admitted provisionally to the program due to undergraduate GPAs of below 3.0 must earn a 3.0 or higher in their first nine credit hours of coursework. Failure to do so results in the convening of a Tier 3 SRC hearing. This is described below.

Ethical Behaviors

Violations of the Ethical Behavior Standards may occur in any setting -- including practicum, on campus, or elsewhere in the community, including social media. Ethical violations may be reported by instructors (such as in the case of academic misconduct) or by clients, peers, administrators, staff or practicum agency employees.

Tier 1 responses typically occur when unethical behavior occurs in the classroom or field and is addressed by the classroom or field instructor during supervision or through other corrective interactions. These are common occurrences that are part and parcel of the social work educational and socialization processes.

Tier 2 reviews occur when an unethical behavior continues to occur, and a classroom or field instructor feels compelled to report the behavior to administration. In consultation with administration, program coordinators or field liaisons develops a Student Success Plan designed to correct the ethical misconduct.

Tier 3 reviews occur when lower level responses fail or when an unethical behavior is so egregious that a SRC meeting must be convened.

Professional Conduct

Violations of the Professional Conduct Standards may occur in any setting -- including practicum, on campus, or elsewhere in the community, including social media. Professional misconduct may be reported by instructors or by peers, administrators, staff or practicum agency employees. Sometimes professional conduct issues can be reported to the university from the larger university community, for example by campus police, student groups, or other academic units or departments.

Tier 1 responses typically occur when professional misconduct occurs in the classroom or field and is addressed by the classroom or field instructor during supervision or through other corrective interactions. These are typically common occurrences that are part and parcel of the social work educational and socialization processes.

Tier 2 reviews occur when professional misconduct continues to occur, and a classroom or field instructor feels compelled to report the behavior to administration. In consultation with administration, academic advisors or field liaisons develops a Student Success Plan designed to correct the professional misconduct.

Tier 3 reviews occur when lower level responses fail or when professional misconduct is so egregious that a SRC meeting must be convened.

Student Review Committee Meetings

General Information

When a Tier 1 or 2 effort at problem resolution is unsuccessful or a problem is so egregious or concerning that a lower level response is not indicated, an SRC meeting can be requested by a classroom instructor, faculty advisor, or the Field Education Director. The MSW Program Director then determines whether an SRC is indicated. The SRC hearing process is used for difficulty in performance with any of the standards, although the composition of the committee may vary slightly depending on the focus of the concern.

The MSW Director invites participants to the SRC including the student, the Director of Field Education, and the student's faculty advisor. At times, academic advisors, classroom instructors, field instructors, or field liaisons (at the MSW Director's discretion) are invited, although generally their written report regarding the classroom concerns is used as their input for the meeting, a copy of which is provided to all attendees. Students may not invite additional participants to an SRC Meeting. If a student does not attend a scheduled SRC meeting, the SRC meeting will proceed in the student's absence and the student will be provided with a written report of the meeting and its outcome. At a minimum, the SRC requires the attendance of the MSW Program Director, and the Director of Field Education or their designated proxy representatives. Any faculty or staff person with a conflict of interest with a particular student for whom an SRC is convened should notify the Associate Dean for Academic Programs that they are recusing themselves from service.

During this meeting, relevant information provided by all participants will be reviewed. SRC recommendations generally should be based on clear documentation of the problem areas as well as evidence that these concerns have been discussed with the student and attempted to be ameliorated, where appropriate. In a case where resolution of the problem performance or behavior does not seem to be possible, the SRC may recommend to the Dean that the student be dismissed from the MSW program. Students must be notified of the decision in writing within five business days of the review.

SRC Meeting Findings and Outcomes

The SRC may make the following types of decisions and recommendations after review of the student's particular facts and circumstances:

1. **Continue the student in the program with no conditions.**
In these situations, the student concern has been addressed and a formal warning from the SRC is issued. However, no further action by the student or program is required.
2. **Recommend the issuance of a formal censure or admonition from the Dean of the School of Social Welfare.**
The committee may decide that the student can continue, but the behavior in question should be admonished, censured, or permanently noted on the student's formal transcript by the Dean.

3. **Establish formal conditions for the student's continuance in the program.**

In these situations, specific conditions must be met in order for the student to remain in the program. Actions may include, but are not limited to, establishing academic or behavioral goals, a plan, a timeline, and appropriate monitoring; requiring the completion of a particular assignment or additional coursework; providing mentoring and support; placing the student on probation and monitoring the student during the probationary period; referring the student to counseling and/or advising services; suspending a student's participation in practicum until the academic issue, ethical behavior or professional conduct issue is resolved; allowing the student to follow a reduced course load or delay entry to the field practicum; repeating part or all of a field practicum; or requiring the student to withdraw from the program with the option of reapplying.

4. **Recommend dismissal of the student from the program.**

It may be recommended that the student be formally dismissed from the MSW program. The student is notified of the recommendation and the recommendation is made to the Dean of the School of Social Welfare.

In all cases in which an SRC is convened, the Program Director completes documentation of the meeting by completing an SRC meeting form (See Appendix A) and sends the document to all who attended. The SRC form includes a section in which the student may respond to the meeting and to the director's documentation of it, and that is included in the permanent record of the incident or issue. Upon completion of the student response, the document is forwarded to the Dean and others who require a permanent record of the committee proceedings.

Decision by the Dean

Once notified, students have five business days to respond to the content of the SRC Meeting Form. It is the responsibility of the Program Director to communicate the outcome with the student, unless it is an action (such as a dismissal or formal censure) that must be carried out by the Dean of the School of Social Welfare. The Dean has five (5) business days to determine whether they concur with the decision to issue a censure, suspend, or dismiss the student from the program. After receiving the SRC Meeting Form with the student's response, if any, the Dean will review the matter and determine whether to accept the recommendations. The Dean may accept, reject or modify the recommendations of the SRC or send the matter back to the SRC for further consideration. The decision of the Dean is effective immediately unless otherwise specified in the notification. The Dean's decisions on these matters may not be appealed within the School of Social Welfare.

SRC Summary Form

[Download SRC Summary Form here \(doc\)](#)