POLICY ON STUDENT ADVANCEMENT IN THE SOCIAL WORK MAJOR

Social workers’ professional actions and decisions impact the lives of vulnerable persons. Because the BASW is a professional degree, meeting academic performance standards is a necessary, but not sufficient, outcome for ensuring advancement in the social work program. As future social work professionals, social work students must meet the academic standards (knowledge, skills, and competencies) and professional behavior standards of the program which are based on, but not limited to the requirements of the NASW Code of Ethics and the University of Iowa’s Code of Student Life.

Undergraduate social work students are advanced from one semester to the next based upon meeting both satisfactory academic progress and professional behavior standards each semester. The BA Program Director consults with faculty members each semester to review students’ academic progress in classroom courses and in the field experience. The BA Program Director also informally consults with faculty about student concerns that may arise at any time during the semester. Students will be notified each semester, by letter sent to their University email account, whether they are advanced to the next semester. Students who receive an unconditional advancement are permitted to continue their progress through the program. If the faculty review raises concerns about a student’s academic performance or professional behavior, the student will be notified per the procedures described in the PROCEDURES FOR STUDENT ADVANCEMENT AND PROBLEM RESOLUTION section of this document about the process for remediating the concerns.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS OF THE PROGRAM

Undergraduate social work students are expected to demonstrate the integration and application of the competencies stipulated by the Council on Social Work Education’s Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) described in the BA Social Work handbook. Each course in the curriculum is designed to address multiple competencies through methods including lecture content, in class and written assignments, presentations, group projects, exams, and skill practice.

Academic Performance:

- Students are expected to maintain an overall cumulative 3.0 GPA in letter-graded courses in the major and a satisfactory (S) grade in non-letter graded courses in the major.
- Students must maintain an overall 2.0 GPA. The minimum GPA of 2.0 is consistent with CLAS policy and includes a grade point average of 2.0 (C) in all college work attempted and all work undertaken at the University of Iowa.
- Students are expected to demonstrate honesty and integrity in all aspects of their academic program and adhere to the CLAS Code of Academic Honesty (http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/academic-fraud-honor-code).

PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR STANDARDS OF THE PROGRAM:

Students’ professional behaviors and student impairment (as discussed below) are also issues to be considered when advancing students in the BSW program. Students are expected to adhere to the University of Iowa Code of Student Life (see II-A at https://dos.uiowa.edu/policies/code-of-student-life-15-16/), the UI Policy on Sexual Harassment and all other CLAS and University policies governing student behavior. Social Work students are also bound by the NASW Code of Ethics in their interactions in the program and field placement. Additional or more specific descriptions of professional behavior are provided below. Students are expected to meet these behavioral standards in the classroom, the field setting, in interactions with faculty and peers, and when representing the School of Social Work in the community or outreach activities.

Professional Behavior and Violations:

- **Attendance**: Students are expected to abide by class attendance policies. Students are also expected to attend all required meetings requested by faculty or related to class group projects and program and field orientations. Students are expected to follow the course policy regarding notifying their instructors about absences.
Students are expected to respond to correspondence from faculty and classmates with whom they are working on projects in a timely manner. This includes regularly checking their UIOWA email account, the Record, and student mailboxes for program or course information. All written communication should be done in a professional manner. 

**Mild violation:** Example: Student does not respond to email requests from faculty or classmates related to course work in a timely manner. Student has a single incident of responding in a less than professional way to faculty or classmates.

**Moderate to severe violation:** Example: Student exhibits a pattern of not responding to communication in a timely manner which is determined by the nature or urgency of the communication or course policy. The student routinely communicates in an unprofessional way in their program-related communication.

**Respectful Communication:** Students are expected to be engaged in their courses, field placement, and other program activities. This expectation for respectful communication applies in the classroom, the field setting, in interactions with faculty and peers outside the classroom, and when representing the School of Social Work in community or outreach activities.

**Mild violation:** Example: All forms of disrespectful communication are considered moderate to severe violations.

**Moderate to severe violation:** Example: Interrupting when others are speaking; having sidebar conversations in class; using a tone of voice that is irritable or hostile; eye rolling or other non-verbal forms of communicating disrespect; expressing disagreement with others’ opinions and views in a disrespectful manner.

**Engagement:** Students are expected to be engaged in their courses, field placement, and other program requirements. Students should also refrain from behaviors that may impact the engagement of others, such as the use of personal cell phones, social networking sites, or other forms of technology that may disrupt the learning of others.

**Mild violation:** Example: Infrequent but inappropriate use of technology in the classroom or field setting such as texting, emailing, and/or surfing the web.

**Moderate to severe violation:** Example: Student exhibits a pattern of sleeping in class; and/or a pattern of engaging in activities that exhibit inattentiveness such as texting, checking emails or social media, and/or surfing the web during class.

**Acceptance of Feedback:** Students will respond to suggested feedback by faculty and field supervisors and will then take steps to integrate the feedback into their professional conduct. Students will use the feedback as a tool to help strengthen their practice and awareness of self.

**Mild violation:** Example: Student exhibits some defensiveness, anger, or a lack of ownership when receiving constructive feedback from others.

**Moderate to severe violation:** Example: Student exhibits a pattern of defensiveness, anger, denial or a lack of ownership when receiving constructive feedback from others or fails to integrate this feedback into their professional conduct.
• **Professional Attire**: Students will dress in a fashion that is appropriate for professional situations, including field placement, meetings, interviews and interactions with current or future colleagues.

  *Mild violation*: Example: Student occasionally dresses in a manner that is not considered professional for the particular context or setting.

  *Moderate to severe violation*: Example: Student exhibits a pattern of dressing in a way that is not considered professional for the particular context or setting.

• **Reliability and dependability**: Students will complete all assignments and tasks by the assigned deadline for classes, group projects, committees, meetings, and/or field requirements. Students will actively participate in professional situations by attending meetings on time and being prepared to engage and participate in the agenda.

  *Mild violation*: Example: Student has an occasion where work is incomplete or inadequate or disregards deadlines for assignments.

  *Moderate to severe violation*: Example: Student exhibits a pattern of producing incomplete or inadequate work or disregarding deadlines for assignments.

**Student Impairment:**

The National Association of Social Worker’s Code of Ethics, Section 4.05, addresses social worker impairment that may interfere with professional social work practice and requires social workers to take necessary steps to address the impairment. Impairment may be reflected in a student’s inability or unwillingness to control psychosocial stress, mental health issues, substance abuse, or other personal problems that interfere with professional functioning. Students who are impaired show signs of being unable or unwilling to comprehend and resolve their personal issues in a manner that does not interfere with their professional responsibilities (Bemak, Epp & Keys, 1999; Lamb, Presser, Pfost, Baum, Jackson & Jarvis, 1987). Students are encouraged to contact the University Counseling Service -- [https://counseling.uiowa.edu/](https://counseling.uiowa.edu/) -- for assistance with any problems they experience.

**PROCEDURES FOR STUDENT ADVANCEMENT AND PROBLEM RESOLUTION**

A student’s academic problems or professional behavior violations or impairment may be self-identified or be observed by a student, faculty member, field instructor, adjunct instructor, faculty mentor, staff person, agency field supervisor, agency colleague, or client. Concerns must initially be reported to the BA Program Director. If the concern is brought by a faculty or staff member of the School, the faculty or staff member will serve as the school representative for the concern process. If the concern is brought by another student or an individual outside the School, the BA Program Director will serve as the designated school representative who will address the student concern process. If the BA Program Director, in his or her judgment, has a conflict of interest, the Director of the School will appoint an acting BA Program Director to serve in the role to address that particular concern.

Student advancement issues can be addressed through an informal or formal concern process depending on the seriousness of the concern. At any procedural point, the student may begin a grievance process (please refer to the Appeal/Grievance Policies and Procedures Policy on page C-12 of this document).

**Informal Concern Process**

If the student is experiencing an academic problem that appears temporary or the student’s professional behavior expectations constitute a ‘mild violation’, the individual raising the concern will notify the BA Program Director. The BA Program Director may respond to the concern directly or collaborate with the school representative or others regarding an appropriate response.

In most cases, the school representative or Program Director will request a meeting with the student to discuss the concern. In some situations, simply informing the student of the concern is sufficient at this informal level. An outcome of this meeting could also be a determination that the student has not violated a professional behavior standard and no further action is required. In circumstances involving a minor academic concern or a mild violation of professional behavior standards, the school representative or Program Director and student can identify a plan for addressing the concerns. The school representative or Program Director will normally document the discussion about the concern in an email to the student, which will be copied to the BA Program Director, and if resolved, no further action is needed and the student continues to advance through the program.
Formal Concern Process

If the conduct addressed in an informal meeting cannot be resolved informally, the concern falls within the “moderate to severe” violation category, or there is reason to believe the student is impaired, the BA Program Director may designate the issue for resolution by the formal concern process. The purpose of this process is to address academic standards or professional behavior standards before the concern results in dismissal.

1. Immediate Dismissal

If the school representative has a concern about a student’s conduct or impairment that he or she believes is so egregious as to be grounds for immediate dismissal, the school representative will notify the BA Program Director and the Director of the School of this concern. The school representative will write a summary description of the concern. If the Program and School Directors concur that the circumstance meets grounds for immediate dismissal, the BA Program Director will write a letter of dismissal to the student. The letter will specify in what way(s) the student is not meeting the School’s standards. The letter will be sent to the student by email (UI account) and by mail, with restricted delivery (requires a signature). The student has a right to grieve this dismissal decision through the process described below.

2. Letter of Concern, Departmental probation and the Advancement Meeting

A letter of concern is the means by which the School notifies a student that the student is not meeting a standard for advancement.

a. Letter of Concern. When the BA Program Director designates an issue for resolution by the Formal Concern Process, he or she will ask the school representative to write a letter of concern to the student. The letter will specify in what way(s) the author of the letter believes that the student is not meeting the School’s standards. The letter will be sent to the student by email (UI account) and by mail, and copied to the student’s faculty mentor and the BA Program Director.

Upon receipt of the Letter of Concern, the student must contact the school representative to schedule the Advancement Meeting described below with the school representative, the student’s faculty mentor, and the BA Program Director. If the student fails to respond to the letter within two weeks of the date it was sent, the school representative may notify the BA Program Director who may initiate the dismissal process described below.

b. Advancement Meeting and Remediation Contract. The school representative will meet with the student, the student’s faculty mentor, and the BA Program Director, to develop and agree to a plan to assist the student in addressing or remediating the concern. The BA Program Director or designee will write a remediation contract, obtain signatures and place the contract in the student’s file. The contract will state

i. the nature of the concern(s) in an appropriate level of detail

ii. the actions to be taken by the student and, if applicable, others

iii. the dates by which each action must be completed.

iv. the date by which the BA Program Director and the school representative will review the contract to determine whether all actions were completed on time

v. the student is on departmental probation until the terms of the contract are met

The contract must be signed by the student, the BA Program Director (or designee), and the school representative.

c. Refusal to Meet or to Sign the Contract. By signing the remediation contract, all of the signatories agree to the terms of the contract. If a student is unwilling to meet to develop a remediation contract or is unwilling to sign the contract, the School may conclude the student has not demonstrated sufficient commitment to progress in the program and may be dismissed. If the student does not agree to sign the contract and the School takes some action as a result, the student can initiate a grievance process with regards to the School’s action by providing written notification to the Director of the School within two weeks of any such action. Such written notification should conform with the requirements of the Grievance Policy and Procedures below.
d. Departmental probation and Letter of Advancement with Departmental probation. Students who have a remediation contract are on departmental probation. When a student has an approved remediation contract that extends past the current semester, the BA Program Director will write a letter of advancement with departmental probation, stating the student is advanced to the next semester on a departmental probationary basis. A student on departmental probation may be restricted from entering the field placement until the concern is sufficiently resolved.

e. Remediation Contract Evaluation. The school representative, on or before the date specified in the contract, will meet with BA Program Director to discuss the student’s progress meeting the conditions of the remediation contract. If the student has satisfied the contract requirements by the agreed-upon dates, the BA Program Director will notify the student by email of the student’s University account, with a copy to the student’s file.

If the school representative and BA Program Director determine that the student has not fulfilled the remediation contract requirements, subject to the guidance set forth below in subsection (f), the BA Program Director will notify the student by email of the unfulfilled contract terms and the potential for dismissal (see Section 2 below, "Letter of Dismissal or Alternative Action").

f. Failure to Fulfill the Remediation Contract Requirements. When the student does not meet all action steps in their remediation contract by stated deadlines, the BA Program Director will begin the dismissal process described in Section 2 below. This dismissal process pertains only to the School of Social Work. A student dismissed from the School is not dismissed from the University unless the reason for dismissal meets the CLAS criteria (see http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/dismissal).

The school recognizes three potential circumstances in which the failure to meet remediation contract requirements may not warrant dismissal:

(a) If the student renegotiated the remediation contract PRIOR to deadlines. Renegotiation includes meeting with members of the advancement committee, rewriting the remediation contract and obtaining signatures;

(b) If the student can document an emergency that prevented him or her from renegotiating the remediation contract before deadlines stated in the contract or that prevented him or her from completing an action in the contract before its deadline; and/or

An emergency may, but need not, involve the student’s physical or mental health; family, such as caring for a parent or child with a health condition; maternity; finances; and military or religious service. Students must speak with the BA Program Director and their faculty mentor to discuss how to document the emergency.

(c) If the student believes someone violated, misinterpreted or improperly applied a University, College, or School procedure, rule, regulation, or policy during the advancement process that prevented him or her from meeting the remediation contract action steps and/or from renegotiating a new contract before the deadlines stated in the contract.

2. Letter of Dismissal, or Alternative Action.

If the BA Program Director concludes the student has not met the conditions of the remediation contract and should be dismissed from the program, the BA Program Director will send an email to the student’s University of Iowa email account informing the student of the dismissal decision and instructing the student that he or she can meet with the BA Program Director. If the student does not contact the BA Program Director to schedule an appointment within one week of the email, the BA Program Director will write and send the letter of dismissal.

At the meeting with the student, the BA Program Director and the school representative will discuss the unfulfilled remediation contract provisions and hear any evidence that the student may offer relating to why the student believes he or she should be permitted to remain in the program. Following this meeting, the BA Program Director will take one of two actions: dismiss or an alternative action.

Dismiss. If the BA Program Director has determined that the student did NOT complete all actions on time, and the BA Program Director does not believe that the evidence proffered by the student at the meeting warrants the student’s continuation in the program, the BA Program Director will write a letter of dismissal to the student stating the student has not met all conditions of the program and/or remediation contract, is not advanced to the next semester, and will not be permitted to re-
register. A copy of the dismissal letter is sent to the student, the Director of the School, the school representative, the student’s faculty mentor, and the College. A copy is also placed in the student’s file.

The letter will be sent to the student by email (UI account) and by mail. The letter will state that the student has two weeks to initiate the grievance process by notifying the Director of the School in accordance with the grievance policy below.

**Alternative Action.** If the Report concluded the student did NOT complete all actions on time, but the BA Program Director concludes that good cause exists for the student to remain in the program, the BA Program Director will prescribe any additional conditions required for the student to remain in the program through alternative action, and the timeframe by which those conditions will be met. The BA Program Director will notify the student of his/her decision by letter, with a copy to the school representative and the student’s faculty mentor. The letter will also state whether the student remains on departmental probation while an alternative action is being taken.

**Dismissal, Confidentiality and Letters of Recommendation**

All faculty, staff and other school representatives will abide by all applicable privacy rules and FERPA regulations regarding the disclosure of the fact that a student was dismissed from the social work program.

When students ask for letters of recommendation, **staff or faculty members will**

a. ask for the request in writing,
b. ask the student to state whether the student waives the right to read the letter prior to the staff or faculty member submitting it, and
c. inform the student that a faculty or staff member can decline to provide a letter of reference for the student.
School of Social Work Advancement and Grievance Outcomes

School Representative identifies a standard unmet or unlikely to be met

BA Program Director informed of concern

Concern addressed informally

School Representative writes letter of concern and sends to student and also sends a copy to the faculty mentor and Program Director

Student’s failure to respond to the letter may result in dismissal

Failure to sign the contract may result in dismissal

Advancement Meeting, Remediation Contract and Departmental probation

Contract fulfilled, student advanced

Contract not fulfilled

Alternative action, departmental probation extended

Contract fulfilled, student advanced

Contract not fulfilled

Letter of Dismissal
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<tr>
<th>Name of Document</th>
<th>Written by . . .</th>
<th>Sent to . . .</th>
<th>Includes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter of Concern</td>
<td>BA Program Director or other school representative</td>
<td>● Student</td>
<td>● Concern&lt;br&gt;● Request for advancement meeting</td>
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<td>● Copy to BA Program Director, faculty advisor/mentor, student’s file</td>
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<td>● If plagiarism is alleged, the College must receive the letter</td>
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<td>Remediation Contract</td>
<td>BA Program Director or designee</td>
<td>Copy to school representative, faculty advisor/mentor, student, student’s file</td>
<td>See narrative</td>
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<td>Letter of Advancement with Departmental probation</td>
<td>BA Program Director if the remediation contract exceeds one semester</td>
<td>● Student</td>
<td>Decision to advance on departmental probation</td>
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<td>● Copy to faculty advisor/mentor, student, student’s file</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remediation Contract Evaluation</td>
<td>BA Program Director</td>
<td>● BA Program Director</td>
<td>Satisfactory completion or;&lt;br&gt;Request for dismissal or alternative action</td>
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<td>● Copy to faculty advisor/mentor, student, student’s file</td>
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<td>Letter of Advancement or Alternative Action</td>
<td>BA Program Director</td>
<td>● Student</td>
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<td>● Copy to Director of the School, school representative, faculty advisor/mentor, student’s file</td>
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Problem Resolution

The problem resolution process in the School of Social Work is used to address problems involving dismissal and problems not involving dismissal. Information on students’ rights and responsibilities in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences can be found at http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/student-rights-responsibilities. Notwithstanding the grievance procedure set forth below, students and faculty are at all times encouraged to resolve problems on an informal basis.

Grievance Policy and Procedures

Issues that may be appropriate for a grievance at the School level include a violation, misinterpretation, or improper application of University, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, or School procedures, rules, regulations, or policies governing the BA program, including dismissal from the program when there may have been a procedural error in the advancement process or a violation of University policy. To initiate a grievance, the student must first notify the Director of the School in writing within two weeks of the action that is the subject of the student’s complain. The student’s written notification to the Director of the School must describe:

(a) the facts and circumstances of the alleged violation,
(b) the University, College, or School procedure, rule, regulation, or policy allegedly violated,
(c) the person or persons alleged to be in violation,
(d) the date(s) of the alleged violation, and
(e) the preferred remedy sought by the student.

Upon receipt of the student’s written notification, the Director of the School will schedule a meeting with the student at which time the student will present all evidence in support of the student’s claim(s). The Director of the School may request submission of documents in advance of the meeting. The Director of the School also has the discretion to approve or deny the presence of student representatives at this meeting.

Following the meeting, the Director of the School may solicit information from any other individual who may have information pertinent to the grievance. The Director of the School may also schedule a follow-up meeting with the student if appropriate. At the conclusion of this evidence-gathering process and depending on the nature of the issue, the Director of the School will:

(a) take action within his or her authority to resolve the issue and provide to the student a written response explaining the rationale for such action,
(b) refer the student to the College or to another office (e.g., Office of the Ombudsperson), or
(c) determine that the issue is grievable at the School level and proceed as described below.

If the Director of the School determines, in his or her sole discretion, that the issue is grievable at the School level, the Director of the School will appoint a grievance committee of three faculty members, one of whom will be appointed by the Director of the School to serve as the committee moderator. The Director of the School will attempt to appoint members who were not directly involved in the student’s allegation. The Director of the School will send an email to the student’s University of Iowa email account informing the student of the committee’s membership.

The Director of the School will provide the committee with the written grievance materials. The committee will meet to review the materials and may seek additional information from the Director of the School, the student, or others who may have pertinent information. Upon reaching a decision, the committee will make a recommendation to the Director of the School in writing and accompanied by its rationale.

The Director of the School will either accept or reject the committee’s recommendation or direct the committee to clarify their decision within one week of receiving the initial recommendation.
The Director of the School will provide a copy of the committee’s recommendation and rationale, along with his or her final decision to the student by email (UI account) and by mail. If the allegation is rejected, the letter will describe additional actions the student can take to address his or her issue.

If the basis of the grievance was dismissal, the letter will state whether the student is advanced, dismissed or on departmental probation. If the student is placed on departmental probation, then an advancement meeting will be scheduled with the student.